

# **21<sup>st</sup> Annual Firefighter of the Year Heroic Awards**

## **December 21, 2010**

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*In total 16 awards will be presented to 23 firefighters: one Medal of Honor; six Medals of Valor to individual firefighters; and five Individual Awards for Meritorious Conduct, one Community Service award and three Group Awards for Meritorious Conduct to teams of firefighters.*

### **1 Medal of Honor:**

**Shirley Fire Department**

**Capt. Joseph Hawthorne**

**First to arrive at a fire near his home and rescued a woman on the second floor with no protective gear**

In the early morning hours of December 6, 2009, Shirley Fire Captain Hawthorne, a firefighter with the Shirley Department since 1980, was at home in bed at 2 a.m. when the tone went out for the fire. He recognized the address as being just yards from his home so he went around the corner directly to the fire scene instead of going to the station first to grab his gear. Dispatch was already reporting that a person was trapped inside the 4-unit apartment building and when he arrived three children ran up to him screaming that their mother was still inside. The porch was already fully involved and racing up to the second floor. He knew he didn't have much time to act. Without protective gear and with conditions rapidly deteriorating, he found her on the floor and dragged her outside. Her burns were extensive and he suffered burns to his hands. She stopped breathing outside and Capt. Hawthorne gave her a few rescue breaths and she started to breathe again. Captain Hawthorne's heroic actions reunited the mother with her three children.

### **6 Medals of Valor:**

**Chelmsford Fire Department**

**FF Kevin O'Brien**

**Rescued combative, intoxicated father from kitchen fire with teens in apt.**

The members of Chelmsford Fire Engines 1 and 2 responded to a call of an apartment fire in the early afternoon of December 30, 2009. It was Firefighter Kevin O'Brien's quick thinking that led to the decision to focus first on search and rescue. He realized no occupants had greeted arriving firefighters despite the 9-1-1 call coming from inside the apartment. The likelihood that people were trapped was great. He ran back to the engine and grabbed a thermal imager and ultimately located an unresponsive man lying on the kitchen floor.

Firefighter O'Brien, without regard for his own safety, removed his mask and placed it on the victim to revive him. When the victim regained consciousness, he also became suddenly violent and combative. Firefighter O'Brien wrestled with the victim before other firefighters arrived to help get the victim safely out of the burning apartment. They also rescued two teenage girls they found hiding in a back

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bedroom. After the rescue operation, firefighters including Firefighter O'Brien began to extinguish the now raging kitchen fire.

**Fitchburg Fire Department      Lt. Roberto Alicea  
FF Todd Reese**

**Recovered 16 yr old from attic  
of multi-family home**

On the night of September 16, 2009, the Leominster Fire Department received a call for a building fire. Upon arrival, firefighters found heavy fire in a multi-family building, with a report of residents trapped inside. Fitchburg's Engine 1 and Ladder 3 were dispatched for the second alarm. Lieutenant Alicea and Firefighter Reese went to the second floor in search of a missing teenager. As the Leominster chief was ordering all firefighters out of the building due to dangerous conditions, Lt. Alicea and FF Reese had made their way to the third floor attic, by way of a narrow staircase, and found a heavy-set young man, unconscious in his bedroom. They successfully carried him out of the building, under extreme conditions that included both of them running out of air in their tanks. Sadly, the teenager died a short time later.

**Lynn Fire Department      Lt Roger Alley  
FF Andrew Kreamer  
FF Marc Lacaille**

**Removed unconscious victim from  
fire in hoarder residence**

It was November 3, 2009, and Engine 5's crew consisting of Lt. Roger Alley and Firefighters Andrew Kreamer and Marc Lacaille, responded to a residential structure fire. Police officers told arriving firefighters that an occupant was trapped on the first floor who they had been unable to reach because fire conditions were untenable. A massive amount of combustible materials stored throughout the entire residence also presented an additional challenge to rescue. The firefighters fought their way through mountains of accumulated trash and combustible materials collected over years of hoarding behavior. The occupant was located and found to be in cardiac arrest. He was removed from the house under hostile fire conditions and put in the care of paramedics who revived him on the way to the hospital. To complicate an already difficult situation, the fire had developed into a mass casualty incident with six additional victims: three residents and three courageous Lynn police officers who had rushed to their aid, suffered smoke inhalation.

#### **4 Individual Meritorious Conduct Awards:**

**Lynn Fire Department      Capt Timothy Collier**

**Found victim trapped on 8th  
floor, burned and unconscious,  
stayed until medics arrived**

Shortly before noon on February 13, 2010 a fire broke out on a top floor of a Lynn housing complex. Upon arrival, Captain Collier discovered smoke showing from the 8<sup>th</sup> floor. He discovered a problem with the elevator and ran up to the 8<sup>th</sup> floor where a woman informed him that a man was trapped inside an apartment. Without the aid of self-contained breathing apparatus, Captain Collier entered into heavy smoke conditions and conducted a thorough search. He located the victim, a 68-year-old man who had been smoking while using home oxygen, and removed him from the apartment. Upon discovering that the radio was not working, he used a phone and called the dispatcher, ensuring that Emergency Medical Service was sent. Captain Collier stayed with the victim and coordinated his removal down eight flights of stairs to the waiting ambulance.

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**Peabody Fire Department      FF Stephen Pellegrini**

**Off duty responded to submerged vehicle & saved elderly man from drowning**

On a quiet Saturday in October, off-duty Peabody firefighter Stephen Pellegrini was in Essex working on his boat when he heard frantic yelling near the Periwinkle restaurant. He ran to the town dock and saw a car, with two people inside, sinking into the Essex River. It had backed into the water from the restaurant parking lot. Firefighter Pellegrini jumped into the assistant Harbor Master's boat and went to the scene. Witnesses stated they observed a large air bubble coming from the submerging vehicle. Without regard for his own safety, Firefighter Pellegrini dove into the fast moving 56-degree water. He rescued a 95-year-old man from the completely submerged motor vehicle and pulled him to the surface. An Essex police officer in a nearby kayak took the man safely to shore. In a letter of gratitude, the woman occupant, who had escaped on her own, singled out Firefighter Pellegrini for saving her husband, saying he will "always remember Steve calling to him. It gave him the courage to get out of the car."

**Somerville Fire Department      FF Patrick Dorant**

**Rescued woman, who was ready to jump from 3rd floor window over 35 ft extended ladder**

June 27, 2010, was a warm and humid evening when the Somerville Fire Department responded to a rooming house fire on Glenwood Road. Firefighter found that a fire had started in a couch on the front porch was climbing up the exterior of the structure to the roof. The porch was already structurally compromised so another way inside had to be found. A third floor resident was in her room unaware of the fire raging beneath her. When smoke entered her room, she opened the door to extreme heat and dense smoke. She called 911 to notify the department that she was trapped, and made her way to the window as the room filled with heavy smoke. Arriving firefighters heard her yelling. She was now completely shrouded in smoke and was only occasionally visible as the smoke shifted. The crew had great difficulty raising a thirty-five foot ladder to her because the yard was completely overgrown with bushes and the space was very narrow. In the end, the ladder was raised at a very steep angle making the climb very dangerous. Because the victim appeared ready to jump, Firefighter Dorant began ascending the ladder before it was securely lowered into place. He reached out to the victim just in time, guided her onto the ladder and assisted her to the ground, as fire broke through her window.

**Southbridge Fire Department**

**Lt Jason Cantara**

**Off duty, rescued two victims from vehicle that had rolled down hill & burst into flames**

On February 12, 2010, Southbridge Fire Lieutenant Jason Cantara and his family were on vacation traveling down Route 75 in Pasco County, Florida. Suddenly, a moving truck lost control in front of them, rolled over, burst into flames and barreled downhill into a murky swamp. Lt. Cantara, along with other motorists, immediately stopped and quickly realized that there were three men trapped inside the burning vehicle. Battling the flames, intense heat and wading through thick, hip-deep swamp water, the group managed to pull two of the men from the burning wreckage to safety. The third victim was unfortunately pronounced dead at the scene, but it was the quick heroic actions and leadership of Lieutenant Jason Cantara of the Southbridge Fire Department that ultimately saved two lives that day.

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### **1 Group Meritorious Conduct Award with 1 Individual Meritorious Award:**

**Malden Fire Department**

**Lt Stephen Froio**

**FF Brian Parow**

**FF Jim Dockery**

**FF Matt Jewers**

**Rescued woman over ladder from  
her 4<sup>th</sup> floor apt window during  
6-alarm fire**

On January 9, 2010, Ladder Co 3 arrived to find heavy smoke billowing from many windows on the top floor of a 4-story apartment building. They saw a woman calling for help from a 4<sup>th</sup> floor window. The heavy smoke pouring out her window made it clear that she was trapped. Lieutenant Froio immediately called for additional resources as the fire was extending rapidly, and conditions were deteriorating. Lt. Froio ordered the members of Ladder Co. 3, Firefighters Jim Dockery, Matt Jewers and Brian Parow, to raise the 35-foot ground ladder to its fullest extension and braced it on the uneven surface of the front entry way. Then at great personal risk, he climbed the ladder to its last rung and rescued the woman from her window onto the ladder and not a minute too soon. The frightened woman was rescued over the ladder that the men of Ladder Company 3 held firmly in place. The fire crew saw signs of rapidly extending fire in the window behind her.

### **2 Group Meritorious Conduct Awards:**

**Chelmsford Fire Department**

**Capt Dan Funaro**

**FF Dan Corey**

**FF Mike Chiasson**

**FF Dan Manley**

**Rescued combative, intoxicated  
father from kitchen fire with teens  
in apt**

At 12:25 on December 30, 2009, the Chelmsford Dispatch received a call from a teenager who said her father was intoxicated and had just started a fire in the kitchen of their apartment. The two-man crew of Engine 2 – Firefighters Daniel Manley and Kevin O’Brien were the first to arrive on scene. Seeing heavy smoke coming from the second floor of the two-story row house, they began to stretch a hose line up the stairs. Firefighter O’Brien began to fear that people were trapped inside because even though the call reporting the fire had come from inside the building, there were no residents waiting outside to meet them. He ran back to the truck, grabbed a thermal imager and began search and rescue operations without the protection of a hose line. They located a man, unconscious, on the kitchen floor of a second floor apartment. Firefighter O’Brien put his facemask on the man who revived and became combative and started attacking his rescuer. The crew of Engine 1 – Captain Funaro, Firefighter Chiasson and Firefighter Corey – entered the apartment and struggled to subdue the very large, confused and combative man. Captain Funaro and Firefighter Chiasson wrestled with the victim all the way down the stairs, and out the front door where the ambulance crew took charge of him. Firefighters discovered two teenage girls hiding in a rear bedroom and quickly escorted them to safety. At this point the firefighters began to fight the now heavily involved kitchen fire.

**Lynn Fire Department**

**Lt. Michael Noon**

**Lt / Paramedic Paul Whitten**

**Revived fellow FF after he  
suffered a heart attack at a**

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**FF / Paramedic Joel Abreu**

**building fire**

On January 5, 2010, at 10:00 a.m., firefighters of Division 4 responded to a call for a house fire. Upon arrival, heavy fire was visible and a second alarm was struck. However, within twenty minutes of the firefight, the Incident Commander ordered an evacuation of the building and to protect firefighters continued an exterior only attack on the fire. Shortly afterwards, this routine fire operation took a major turn for the worse. Firefighter Marc Ducharme, who was working the fire, felt pain and started to fall next to Ladder 1. Three Firefighter/Paramedics, Lt. Paul Whitten, Firefighter Joel Abreu and Firefighter Michael Noon were right there to catch him. They determined that he was in cardiac arrest and immediately started advanced life support procedures on their fallen brother. On the way to Salem Hospital they were able to restore Firefighter Ducharme's heartbeat and respiration. The professionalism and dedication of the officers and firefighters of Division 4 were displayed throughout this ordeal, as they extinguished this stubborn fire even while the fate of their brother firefighter was unknown.

### **2 Fire Marshal's Awards**

The State Fire Marshal presented two awards to individuals who have worked to make the Commonwealth a safer place: John K. Golembeski, president of the Massachusetts Property Insurance Underwriting Association and Acushnet Fire Chief Kevin Gallagher for his work on modular home construction and fire safety.

On January 13, 2008, Acushnet Fire Chief Gallagher responded to a fire in a new modular home in his community. Despite arriving quickly and using every tactic he knew, the chief was surprised at how quickly the fire devoured the building. This troubled him and he single handedly launched an investigation into why the fire had spread so quickly and why his fire department had been unable to stop it. The trail led him to propose significant changes in modular home construction in our state and across the nation. These changes are leading to improved inspection and enforcement of building codes already on the books and proposed enhancements to existing codes in order to prevent a similar tragedy from occurring elsewhere. While meeting with building code writers and decision makers may not be as dramatic as rescuing people from burning buildings, it will have a long-term impact on the safety of our citizens and our firefighters. This work will certainly save many homes and maybe lives as well. The chief, with the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy, also developed a training program for firefighters on the modular home construction methods and how they react in a fire.

John "Jack" Golembeski has spent decades at the helm of the Massachusetts Property Insurance Underwriting Association; also know as the MA FAIR Plan. This company ensures any qualified homeowner can access insurance regardless of where they live. Jack is always there for me. He is always a phone call away, ready to provide advice and support. He has been committed to seeing that Massachusetts fire investigators have the tools they need to do their jobs. The most important tool is usually information from the community and as sponsors of the statewide Arson Hotline and the Arson Watch Reward Program, many citizens have been encouraged to come forward and help solve cases. Jack had the vision to see that accelerant detection canines could vastly improve the ability to collect evidence that proves the crime of arson and sponsored our first dog. Now the state police fire investigation unit has six teams of fire investigators trained as handlers and their canine partners. Jack has also been a promoter of education: whether it is supporting juvenile firesetting intervention programs, the sponsorship of a middle school poster contest, or helping with our YouTube Burn Awareness Video Contest for high school students. In addition, he has supported training our firefighters

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to do a dangerous job well and safely. These programs and many others would not have been possible without the support and the vision of Jack Golembeski.

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